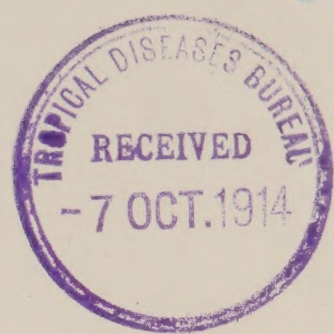


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FEVER ON THE FARM

SOME COMMON CAUSES

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(District Surgeon, Zoutpansberg).*

(From the "Rand Daily Mail," March 24, 1914).



When a farmer gets malaria he calls in a doctor to cure him. The doctor sends him some medicine and gives him certain instructions about food and such like. By and bye the farmer gets better; then the doctor is a good doctor and his medicine the best in South Africa.

But the curious thing is, it never occurs to the farmer to ask how it is that he got the fever at all. He seems to take it for granted that it was all right and just sent by Providence for some reason he does not understand. All the time the information is at his elbow; if he asked the doctor the latter could tell him.

By malaria, of course, I mean fever or "koorts." There are many kinds of fever, but malaria fever is the common fever; whether it is hot fever or cold fever, it is still malaria got only in one particular way.

The doctor, when he is called to the farm, knows that he is only asked to cure the patient; this is all his business, and all he does because he is not asked or wanted to do more. But whatever the patient or his friends say, the

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*Written for the South African Anti-Malarial Association, P.O. Box 2879, Johannesburg, from whom further literature on the Prevention of Malaria may be obtained on application.



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doctor, after a year or two in the district, knows exactly where the fever was caught; by the symptoms and severity he knows if the fever is the local fever or has been brought from some miles away. All men are curious, and if he watched the doctor before he left, the farmer would probably see that he took a good look round. He knew the fever was got on the farm, and he was looking for the source of the fever out of his own mere curiosity, and he does not tell anyone of the family because they do not want to know.

THE CAUSE OF FEVER

If a cow gets East Coast fever or something like it, the policeman jogs along on his mule (this is a horse-sickness district, of course), next the stock inspector drives over in his spider, next the veterinary surgeon gives the Magistrate a lift in his Cape cart, last but not least the "Big Baas" from Pretoria visits the farm to see if the "Piccanin Baases" in the district are doing their duty. But the farmer, with possibly the purest Huguenot blood in his veins, may be sick unto death with malaria, but nobody worries where he got it, although it was generally known it was not necessary for him to get it.

Everybody knows now that malaria is caused by a little organism in the blood, and that this organism was brought there by a mosquito. That is, if a person is sick with malaria, some other person was sick before him, and a mosquito sucking blood from this sick person brought it to a healthy person who in turn got sick.

Therefore, the question which the doctor asks and answers for himself are—Where did he get it? How did he get it? Why did he get it? The answers, as found on an ordinary South African farm, are few in number and easily given.

WHERE DID HE GET IT?

The great source of malaria in South

Africa is the native population. In the kraal no precautions are taken, and very early in life the children get infected and carry the organism in their blood till they grow up.

When the doctor took his look round, he saw the Kaffir kraal right up against the house, and he had no doubt the infection came from there. If he hinted as much to the farmer, the latter would say that the boy who brought his coffee in the morning and the girl who smeared the floor lived in that kraal and had to be handy when wanted. If, however, the old gentleman had put his natives a quarter of a mile away, it is safe to say he might not have had the fever.

But why worry? The farmer's servants are handy, the family had a little practice in sick nursing; the neighbours go about with self-satisfied airs, certain, each of them, that it was his or her advice that really cured the sick man.

HOW DID HE GET IT?

As the mosquito carries the disease from one person to another, to answer this question the doctor looked for the home of the mosquito. He knows that the mosquito breeds in still water in the earth—preferably water shaded by grasses or rushes—and one of these places is soon found.

Just in front of the door, or possibly even behind the house, is the water furrow. It has not been cleaned since the last time it choked. Its fall is the smallest possible just to make the water run. Hence among the grasses which have grown up, the water only just running stops in little pools, and these are full of young mosquitoes.

The remedies are simple—a greater fall to the furrow, and keep it cleaned and its sides trimmed.

Possibly, however, dagga has been wanted for plaster or ground to fill in a floor in the new room. The hole from which this material was taken was never filled and is now full of water and young

mosquitoes. A few barrowfuls of earth or at most a couple of loads of gravel would have filled the hole and might have prevented the fever.

Or perhaps the doctor sees a small vlei a little way down. Here the water is still, the cover is plenty, and the mosquito is at home. The vlei, if drained, makes a beautiful garden, or, if easier to do, a little earth dam with a few fish looks nice. The small fish eat the young mosquitoes and prevent fever. Yes, but the expense! The cheque which the doctor has taken away would have paid for the work.

WHY DID HE GET IT?

Many people get malaria into their systems, and so long as they take care they get no attack and it apparently does no harm. But if such a person gets wet, out comes the fever.

The doctor in coming up the road saw the grass high around the house, and noticed that one, in a dewy morning, could not walk even on the footpaths to the kraal, the stable, or the garden, without getting wet up to the thighs, and in rainy weather must remain wet all day long.

Accordingly if he finds the patient has merely had a relapse of fever, he feels certain it is the wetting due to the wet grass that has brought it out. The grass on the kraal floor would have made food and manure; in its present position it has presented the farmer with a case of malaria.

The late King Edward said of another disease, "If preventable, why not prevented." The message of the medical profession to all present and intending farmers in fever districts is: Malaria is preventable; endeavour to prevent it strenuously for a few years; the first years are the worst years; every year the work becomes less, but the end is sure—the clearance of malaria from your farm and your household.

